



# TIDAL

**OCCUPY  
THEORY  
OCCUPY  
STRATEGY**



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# COM MUN

ivilizations at their peak present curious spectacles. They ooze wealth and pride, produce fantastic art and technologies, all while shredding the foundations of their prosperity. Their citizens seem to believe they eclipse mundane restrictions of time and space. The monuments their predecessors have left in Rome, on Easter Island, in Egypt, in Venice, littered like warning beacons elsewhere throughout the world, demonstrate such faith may not match reality. A rock thrown skyward must believe, at the top of its arc, fleetingly, that it is flying.

When we admire our great cities, we find it hard to believe that they will ever crumble. Most city dwellers even appear to belong to urban cults. In their apartments, surrounded by buildings, you will often find pictures on their walls of — more buildings! These often feature local landmarks, but also occasionally scenes from such eternal cities as Paris, London and New York. These photos hang like private shrines to nature's irrelevance.

Or perhaps the photos signify obeisance. Maybe people want to show they believe in urbanization, hoping that when the machines revolt, they'll grant leniency to those organisms with a demonstrable affection for architecture. You can't help but admire glass towers, and hope that they're on your side.

We need not know the exact reasoning and dimension of people's metropolitan awe. We need merely understand that people journey to cities to pursue dreams, and to escape reality's labor, drudgery and boredom. They view cities as actualized fantasies, where people reinvent their lives as opulent staged shows, starring them. A

successful person in the city will have an astonishing life, and accumulate wealth vastly beyond their actual efforts.

Cities constitute part of the overarching dialectic of transcendence, the process through which humanity transforms existence and overcomes its insulting limitations. The city narrative echoes humanity's hopes generally: a pathetic mammal rises out of the dirt to reveal itself as the demigod it always knew it was. Modern commerce plays an essential role in this dynamic, and unsurprisingly flourishes in urban centers. Commerce attempts to subjugate reality by naming and measuring everything in a common currency, because once something can be measured, it can be traded. And woe be to that thing which becomes tradable. Once something can be counted in money, its days are numbered.

By the logic of commerce, human life itself, through slavery and impoverishing wages, through genetic patents, has become a commodity. We understand nature not as the source of life, but as something to be dissembled to obtain the materials for our new world. In that world, only the price that humans affix to something, usually in their ignorance, holds any relevance. When money can control space, then the rules of money become the rules of space.

Cities and commerce both generate surpluses that can be deployed as we see fit. Here, irony intervenes. One could view surpluses as the shared fruit of the land and collective human enterprise, and employ them to enrich all. More usually, someone will build something stupid, or gaudy, or embarrassingly self-aggrandizing, and then brag



about it with hopeless smugness. They have made themselves bigger. The same mistake repeats like a bad running joke throughout history; wealth that could be spread around ends up gold-plating the emperor's toilet.

At the root of all of this we find the old fears and desires that have always pushed people to hoard: the fear of suffering, death and irrelevance, and the concomitant desire for transformative wealth and power. Faced with this, people struggle to harness the world, and bend it to their wishes.

These feelings have driven the rise of our cities, and so it hardly seems surprising that cities behave like they do. Internally, a city's grand towers and infrastructure grow from the impoverishment of others, much the way that flowers rise from dung. In some cities, the slums of the help literally brush against the gates of their employers. Externally, cities suck nourishment from rest of the world in the form of tribute, trade or tourism, and grow like unsustainable tumors. Cities embody and magnify the greed of their builders, as the constraints that previously checked their development become weaker every year.

A reflective person might even question the wisdom of the overall urban project. Some cities have already commenced disintegrating before us, doomed by the same harsh commercial conditions that created them. As they wither, the elite strip away their remaining valuable scrap. Through the cracks that form in their foundations, we begin to glimpse what these cities suppressed.

It becomes increasingly clear that cities depend upon ignorance and forgetting to thrive. We pave the wilderness into infertile submission so we can ignore it, without really understanding what we've buried. We cover our past in the same way, and discount the costs incurred to build everything around us. This habit confers incredible power. We can extinguish entire native populations, enslave millions, swindle land, drive species extinct, brutalize the poor, and then forget it all ever occurred. What's done is done, if it ever really happened.

Our cities speak of renewal, vitality, transfiguration. Their themes reflect modernity itself. But

beneath the pavement a counter-narrative echoes. Like some secret, untold death myth, it tells of the cycle from nature, to fool's paradise, to necropolis. In these dead cities, citizens drunk on nepenthe attempt to remake life, but only conjure grotesque mockeries of the original. In this telling, skyscrapers serve as sepulchers and tombstones rather than temples of progress.

Many sense this narrative in some fashion. People watch shows about zombies closing in on slivers of humanity and think, "that's what I feel like every day." We suspect that creation now sends monstrous storms to extinguish its intolerable burden. We're confused, because this view clashes so violently with our vision of beautiful skylines. Perhaps we stand too close to judge the situation fairly; no doubt the architect who designed the Pyramids of Giza believed he had created something useful.

Can it be that some deep suicidal impulse has made us build ingenious machines to destroy us completely, as a massive sacrifice to avarice? If so, then cities represent another chapter of the long American con. They serve as another opportunity for an apologist to look you in the eye and tell you about a world that doesn't exist; that everything's okay; that inequality means progress; that pollution means renewal; that vapid masks depth. We might actually believe them were we not so embarrassingly pressed up against the limits of sustainability. Sadly, we're too used to digging out from cataclysms, and to the rhetoric of rebuilding, to pretend. However, out of the many lies that apologists tell, the most crucial is that the overwhelming way of the world may not be altered.

We build our lives and worlds with each decision. We can choose to continue as before amidst the splendid idiocy of it all, or we can work for something beyond baneful self-delusion.

What should a healthy, sustainable city look like? Now is the hour to figure that out, to plan it, while time and life remain to do so. We have picked this moment to begin, and now we must find the space and the method. ■



# Constructing Unity Across Differences

## The Fault Lines of the 99%

BY CHANTAL MOUFFE

The recent “citizen awakening” that we have witnessed with a variety of Occupy movements and akin initiatives is very encouraging because it breaks with the post-political consensus that has been prevalent in recent decades. A taboo has been broken, and the “there is no alternative” neo-liberal mantra has been profoundly shaken. We hear many voices contesting the obscene inequalities that exist in our societies, and they are calling for an end to the unbridled rule by financial capital.

The task now is to ascertain how all of the energies that have burst out can produce lasting political effects. This is the challenge facing the movements in the new stage in which they are entering. How can they maintain their impulse and enlarge their audiences? There is no denying the profound impact of the Occupiers in the public discourse, and their putting the issue of equality on the agenda is no small achievement, especially in the United States. But it is time to pass to the next step, which requires consolidating the allegiance of their followers by clarifying joint objectives. I am not referring here to the need to make specific demands but to the importance of formulating common aims so as to create a political link between their very diverse constituencies. No doubt, this will come at some cost because it will become clear that there are serious divergences within the 99%. Some of them might indeed be serious enough to reveal the existence of severe fault lines behind the consensual unity that the slogan “we are the 99%” suggests. Such a slogan has been praised for its arousing appeal and its inclusive potential. Nevertheless, we might raise some reservations concerning a possible lack of awareness of the wide range of antagonisms existing in society and a rather naïve belief in the availability of a consensual society, once the “bad 1%” was eliminated. This kind of reasoning could easily remain at the level of a moral condemnation of the rich, instead of a political analysis of the complex configuration of the power forces that need to be challenged to create a more just and democratic society. More importantly, this slogan seems to take for

granted the pre-given unity of the we, and it obviates the necessary process of construction of this we through the articulation of a “chain of equivalences” among the manifold protests that propel the movements.

To be sure, the strength of Occupy is to have designated an adversary, but that is not enough to ensure concerted political action. To believe that all those who are involved in Occupy pursue the same objectives and that the diversity of their struggles necessarily converge, by the mere fact of their shared opposition to financial capital, is to proceed too quickly. Without specifying what is at stake in the confrontation with the adversary, shared aims cannot be defined. It is only through a political process of construction of unity across differences that a truly political movement can be established. And it is unlikely that a 99% majority could ever be reached in a pluralist society.

Fortunately some activists are aware of the need for securing lasting links among the multifarious constituencies of Occupy, and several steps are being taken towards a political articulation of the diverse protests. Questioning the mechanisms of the debt, for instance, is an issue particularly apt to bring together very different groups who are affected by the crisis of subprime mortgages or suffering under the crippling consequences of student loans. Another important step consists in joint actions with feminist or immigrant organizations, as well as with sectors of the trade unions, in order to democratize state institutions. The horizontalist nature of the Occupy movement is often celebrated as an exodus from existing forms of democracy but horizontalist practices on their own cannot bring about a profound transformation of power relations in the whole society. They need to be combined with vertical interventions that engage with existing institutions to make them democratically accountable. What is at stake, through the establishment of a synergy between extra-parliamentary and parliamentary struggles, is the building of a left populist movement that would provide the collective will necessary to effectively challenge neo-liberal hegemony. ■



# Debt and/or Wages: Organizing Challenges

BY GEORGE CAFFENTZIS

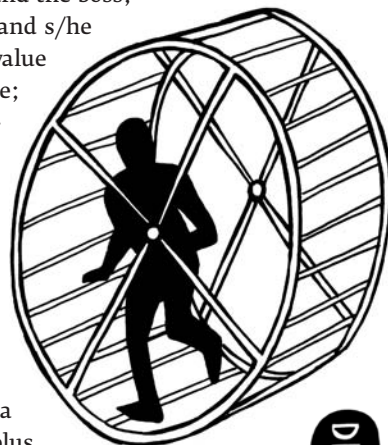
I work as a university teacher and most workers' organizations I have been involved with (and studied) have struggled around wages and working conditions on the job. For example, my union (Associated Faculties of the University of Southern Maine) is now on a "work to rule" action over a wage dispute. But with my involvement with Strike Debt, however, I am now in a debtors' organization. This is a new experience for me and for many others in Strike Debt. I thought that it would be helpful to sketch out quite schematically some of the many dissimilarities between the sphere of debt and that of wage struggles.

First, consider the ideological dimensions of wages and debt. Wages are supposed to be a "fair exchange" between the worker and the boss; the worker works for the boss for the agreed upon time, and s/he receives a fair monetary recompense. But in actual fact the value created by workers is far greater than their monetary wage; there is nothing "fair" about the "exchange," which proceeds anyway because workers are property-less and need to sell their labor power, or they starve. This asymmetry between boss and worker is not total, for the workers often refuse work in a thousand and one ways (going on strike, sabotaging production, "malingering," etc).

Debt also has its ideological character. It, too, is supposed to be a "fair exchange," between creditor and debtor. But in actual fact the creditor gains an interest payment (often many times the principal) and in so doing receives a return for the risk incurred. Refusal to pay back the loan plus interest is considered to be immoral and unfair. The debtor is made to feel ashamed, even to have committed a secular sin. Yet, increasingly, household debt (or "use value" debt, which is used to purchase commodities meant to satisfy needs and desires) is incurred in order to meet basic conditions for the reproduction of life (food, housing, education, health).

Second, there is a profound difference in the temporal order in relation to money between wages and debt. In most cases, the work comes before the boss pays the worker his/her monetary wage. In a way, then, the employer is indebted to the worker until the payment of wages. Indeed, there are cases when the boss refuses to pay wages after the work is done (especially when the worker is undocumented or when the worker is part of the "underground" economy).

In the realm of "use-value" debt, the temporal order is reversed. The debtor receives the money before s/he performs the work needed to earn a wage large enough to pay back the debt principal and interest. The creditor is temporarily vulnerable to the debtor and so the creditor class has developed a whole battery of painful, terrorizing instruments throughout history—tortures, enslavement, servitude, eviction, repossession, foreclosure, psychic torments—in order to guard against the debtor using the social surplus implicit in debt, without repaying it to the creditor.





For the existence of loanable wealth implies that there is more wealth available than is needed to simply reproduce the society. The instruments of torture are meant to “remind” the debtor of the obligation to repay the debt. But there is another function to these instruments: to repress the deep (almost innate) conviction that, in an equitable communal society, those in trouble have the right to tap the social surplus.

Third, there is a logical structure to debt and wages that leads to organizational challenges. Wages are in their nature collective. As a waged worker, one is inevitably thrown into the same work condition as other workers and, for all of their differences—race, gender, skill, etc.—there are commonalities: (1) the capital-labor conflict that leads to collective action and organization (or, at least, it must be continually repressed), and (2) the workplace cooperation required for any real work to be accomplished. Together, these commonalities are the foundation of collective wage struggle.

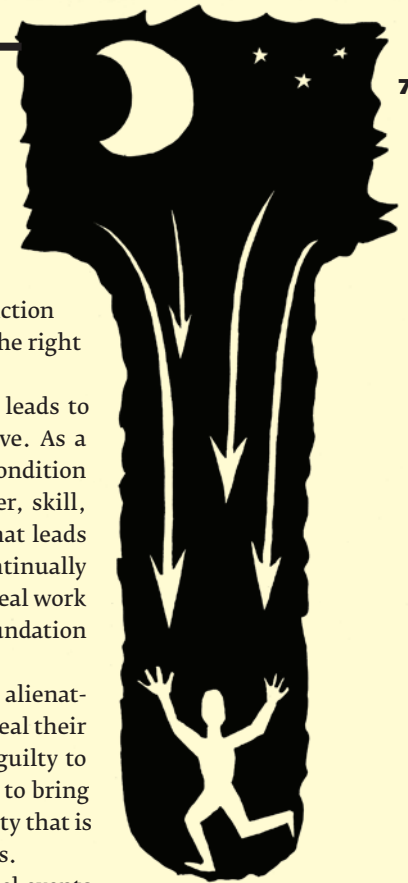
Debt, on the other hand, tends to be individualizing and alienating. Debtors do not necessarily know each other unless they reveal their condition to one another, and they are often too ashamed or guilty to do so. It is therefore necessary, when organizing around debt, to bring the identity of the debtor to the surface and create the collectivity that is continually being repressed and decomposed by the creditor class.

Finally, there is a difference between the revolutionary model events associated with wages and debt. For wages, it is the indefinite general strike, ie. the total, “infinite” refusal to work for the capitalist class. A general strike has revolutionary implications, but it need not have revolutionary consequences. It can lead to the granting of a specific set of reforms in the class relation that makes the system viable for another period.

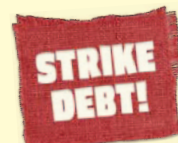
For debt, the model event is the debt Jubilee, i.e., the total cancellation of all debt achieved either by legal change (*de jure*) or by a total debt strike (*de facto*). The Jubilee can have revolutionary implications, but it too need not have revolutionary consequences. There have been debt Jubilees that have simply led to some reforms, only to have the machine of exploitation start anew.

I have presented four differences between debt and wages that have consequences for the organization of a debtors’ movement. There are many others that I have not mentioned. This is an area of class struggle that needs study and attention, for we cannot use the same tactics and strategies developed over centuries of trade union organizing in the struggle around debt.

There are, however, disturbing commonalities between wage and debt struggles. The most salient one being the way in which racial, ethnic, skill, employment, and gender differences are manipulated into divisions among workers and debtors. Just as white workers have historically earned higher wages and have had half the unemployment rate of black workers, so, too, white debtors have received quite different treatment in the hands of the credit system than have black debtors, e.g., the disproportionate number of blacks, compared to whites, who were directed to subprime mortgages by the purveyors of credit. Historically, these inequities within the working class have been the decisive reason why revolutionary systemic (or even reformist) change has not occurred. A similar fate of division and frustration awaits the debtors’ movements of the future unless they can overcome these divisions. ▀



These illustrations are the result of an Occuprint public design session in Fall 2012. The question of how to visualize debt was posed to participants.



[strikedebt.org](http://strikedebt.org)





# Resurrecting Jubilee



**A Faith-Based  
Call for a  
Debtors' Movement**



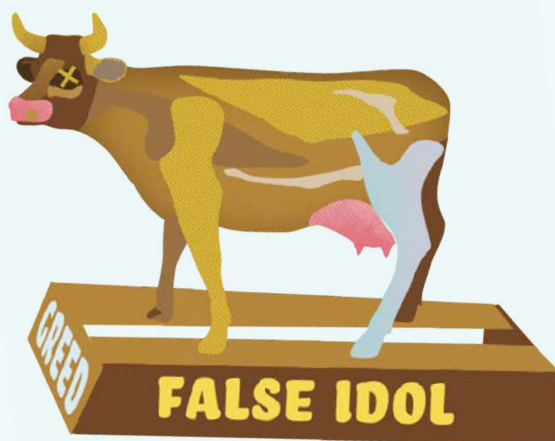
REV. MICHAEL ELLICK, JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH

**T**he Occupy Movement represents at least one major spiritual challenge to all our faith communities. What do our traditions have to say about money, debt, and power? Why are our houses of worship largely silent on issues of economic justice? We live in a society where the Christian Right justifies a hate war against homosexuals by citing two passages from the Bible taken out of context, but where do they stand on usury laws, which the Bible clearly (and far more frequently) condemns? Where is that same moral outrage at predatory lending, or the debt system that keeps so many resources stuck in the hands of a privileged few? Between Islam's explicit ban on usury, and Buddhist and Hindu notions of eliminating karmic debt, where is the national conversation on money, debt, and power as necessarily spiritual issues? For Jews and Christians specifically: whatever happened to Jubilee?

In case they never told you about this part of the Bible in Sunday school: Jubilee was a kind of spiritual antidote to the creeping notions of private property and self-sufficiency that inevitably entered the human mind and lead it astray. From a Biblical perspective, we do not own the land or the fruits of the land that we tend; we are merely stewards called on to tend the land wisely and justly. From a Biblical perspective, God alone owns the land, and all the stuff produced by the land. God alone is our supplier and our sustainer. So, to drive the principle home, YHWH commanded that every seventh year both the land and the people must be given a sabbatical (Deuteronomy 15:1), that they might rest and remember God's sufficiency in all areas of their lives.

But something even more radical took place at the end of seven sabbatical years (that is, every fifty years; Leviticus 25:10). Jubilee was declared: all debts were cancelled; the economy was reset to zero; and financial inequities were erased. Now, for the moment, it doesn't matter whether you'd agree to such a plan or not; if you are anyone claiming any kind of Judeo-Christian spiritual tradition at all, you have to grapple with the fact that this is not the proclamation of a Socialist, or an Anarchist, or an Occupier: This is Moses, in the Torah, telling us that there should be no permanent underclass that is perpetually in debt. Similar calls to economic justice abound in all spiritual traditions. This means that, from a Faith-based perspective, you can't just shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, the poor are poor because they're too lazy to work." Instead, you must recognize the underlying systems of oppression that keep people locked in poverty, and you must remediate them.

So where do our Communities of Faith go from here? First we can educate ourselves about how debt operates today—not just personally, but politically. We can hold teach-ins and study groups; we can host lectures and debt clinics. Through this we can start to lift the veil of shame around debt, and encourage people to share their stories in small groups and even in our worship services. We can learn for ourselves how debt keeps individuals, communities—especially communities of color—and even whole nations trapped in cycles of economic bondage, and how it's only going to get worse if we don't do something about it.

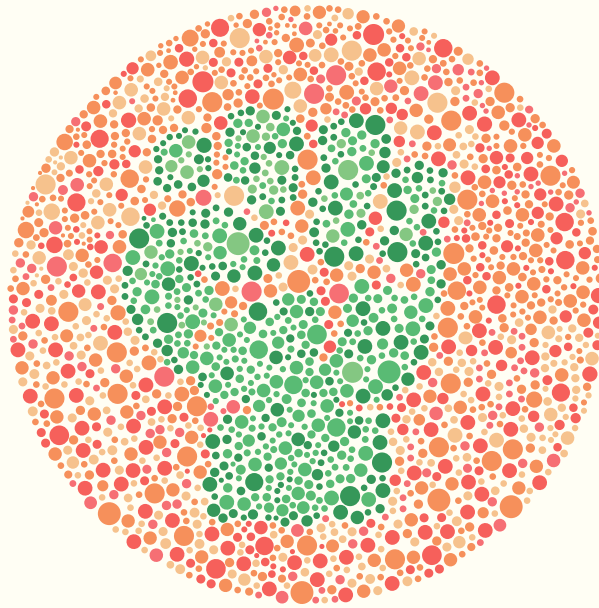


It's the "doing something about it" part where Faith and Community are most needed. If our Communities of Faith are going to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need more than just a liturgical moment reflecting on debt. When you pull at the thread of debt, you threaten to unravel so much more than just our economic system; you threaten to unravel all of our illusions of private property and self-reliance, and, through these, the entire culture of Empire. A new kind of Liberation Theology is needed; one that not only takes debt seriously, but one that understands that all of our local and international justice struggles are connected by a counterfeit spirituality worshiping Money and Power. We must call for nothing short of a transformational Debtors Movement.

It's high time we picked up the torch of the Civil Rights Movement and the Poor People's Campaign, and remember where they were headed. To appreciate the full scope of such a prophetic call, and to remain faithful to it, won't be easy: it will demand new partnerships, and new coalitions that push each of us out of our ideological safety zones and issue silos. But the time has come for a multi-faith, multi-sector, multi-racial Debtors Movement that moves beyond the various symptoms and gets to the main disease. Such a movement may, at any given time, articulate new laws and policies requiring debt forgiveness both foreign and domestic. But we must remember that all calls for forgiveness are always calls from a Higher Law, and that fidelity to this one must often mean disobedience to the other. We must dream beyond the economy of our time, gathering new and unique visions for each of our beloved communities, where love and trust build local economies of interdependence and mutual aid, and the heavens that we all dream of are lived in the here and now. The time has come for revival, resurrection, and a revolution of values for all our people. Seriously: let's call for Jubilee. ■

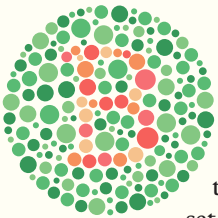
**It's high time we picked up the torch of the Civil Rights Movement and the Poor People's Campaign, and remember where they were headed.**





# Solidarity for Reparation

BY PAMELA BROWN



y the mid 1830s the Grimké sisters had already decided that the only thing left for them to do was to disavow everything they had, leave behind the comforts of Southern leisure, and set foot on what they were certain was the only path to heaven, and the only path to true freedom. For them, their path for liberation as women lay in a common struggle for the freedom of the black slave. Frederick Douglass understood this too. And in 1848, fifteen years prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, he attended the very first Woman's Rights Convention, arguing that it was not only a "degradation" for women to be excluded from civic participation, but a global injustice to eliminate half of the "moral and intellectual power of the government of the world."

In the act of sharing solidarity with women, Douglass humanized himself, finding freedom from the dehumanization and disconnectedness that slavery

demanding. And the Grimké sisters understood that even though they were viewed as masters, they too were really slaves, as long as their lives were built on the foundation of others' suffering. True freedom could only exist in shared struggle, because freedom was to be found in rejecting the social relationship that created either master or slave, and claiming commonality.

In the context of antebellum America and the struggle for abolition, solidarity was found in crossing clearly visualized barriers of race and gender. What would that solidarity look like today? What kind of claims would be needed to build solidarity in a social system characterized by the isolation of the invisible chains of debt and a parallel practice of "colorblindness" that produces the invisibility of race?

The neoliberal moral construct of perpetual indebtedness to non-human financial entities creates a populace so focused on the debts "owed" to Wall Street that we forget any other kinds of debts.

And this is where the politically correct principle of colorblindness that demands the invisibility of race steps in to do its best work. If Malcolm X was right that we “cannot have capitalism without racism,” we have to ask ourselves if racism has really declined with colorblindness, and whether colorblindness might be neoliberalism’s corollary.

If we actually look at the facts, there is no question that structural racism has increased. According to a recent Pew Research Center study, whereas in 1984, the wealth gap ratio between whites and blacks was 12 to 1, dipping all the way down to 7 to 1 in 1995, by 2009 the gap had jumped back up to an astonishing 19 to 1. This jump represents a loss of all economic gains subsequent to Civil Rights.

1995 was the same year that President Clinton announced the Partners in the American Dream program, the first step in the development of the subprime mortgage market. By 1998, advocacy groups like NEDAP were already sounding the alarm bells, trying to stem the tide of predatory mortgages, an economic hate crime targeted at predominantly black communities. Unfortunately, nobody was listening. But hate has a way of spreading, and the subprime mortgage crisis grew under the invisibility of colorblindness. The spread of this financial disaster

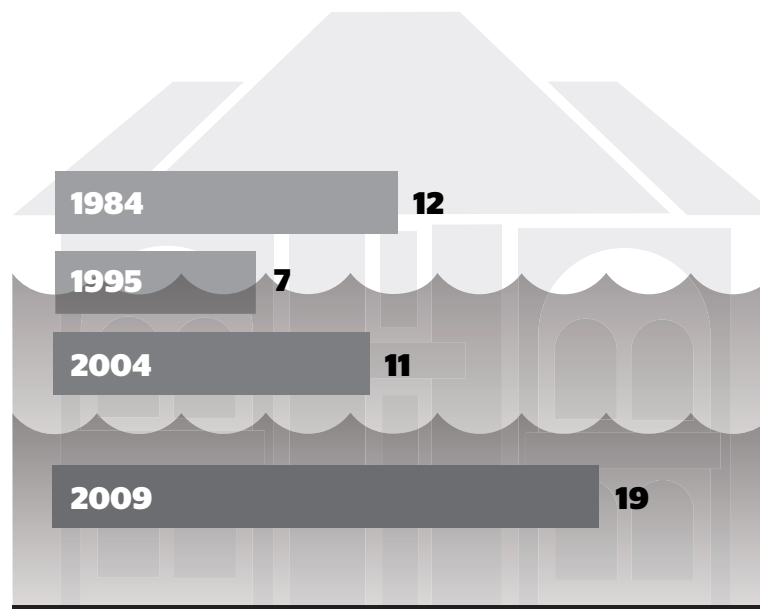
will impact generations to come, but it could not have happened without a refusal to see.

We are constantly reminded of the debts we owe Wall Street, but what of the debts that don’t show up as bills? In 1804, well before the battle for abolition was won here in America, but only after a bloody 13-year struggle, Haitian slaves liberated themselves by successfully defeating Napoleon. Over twenty years later, the French reminded the Haitians that they, themselves, constituted a debt. And, who now remembers the \$20 billion the Haitian people paid to Wall Street to buy their freedom, something that never should have been for sale? And how long will we continue to pretend that debts to Native Americans have been settled? These are the forgotten debts, owed to the ones that have been written off.

Indebtedness is an invisible form that hides itself in the invisible spaces that colorblindness renders.

Whereas Douglass and the Grimké sisters could see the forces that separated them, perhaps in a world of invisibility a demand must first be made to see. This could be an act of solidarity that offers immediate liberation from the conditions of indebtedness. This act of seeing would naturally lead to a demand for liberation not only from the debts we owe, but a demand for payment of debts that are way past due. ■

**We have to ask ourselves if racism has really declined with colorblindness, and whether colorblindness might be neoliberalism’s corollary.**



**Median Wealth Ratios, 1984–2009**

In 1984, the wealth gap ratio between whites and blacks was 12 to 1, dipping down to 7 to 1 in 1995. By 2009 the gap had jumped back up to 19 to 1. 1995 was the same year that President Clinton announced the Partners in the American Dream program, the first step in the development of the subprime mortgage market.



# Mississippi Goddam

## SNCC, Occupy, and Radical Community Organizing

BY SHYAM KHANNA

**T**oday the movement is in a state of impasse. Perhaps by turning to history, exploring the experiences of movements animated by similar values and confronting similar roadblocks, we'll find some guidance on how to move forward.

On February 1st, 1960, four Black students in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat down at the counter of a local Woolworth's, refusing to leave until they were served. Unaware that their actions were to ignite a movement that would radically shake the nation. Similar to Occupy Wall Street, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) emerged out of a wave of direct action that spread almost spontaneously across the country, reshaping the national conversation around inequality and providing space for a new generation of radicals to find each other. The Civil Rights Movement, which had for sometime been stagnating, was given a fresh infusion of new energy. But as the wave passed, the young radicals found themselves in a moment of confusion: the initiative was firmly in their hands, but they were unsure of what direction to go in or how to move forward. Having perhaps reached the limit that style of activism had to offer, they began to shift gears to the longer-term work of community organizing.

Broadly speaking, the Civil Rights Movement can be thought of as containing two distinct traditions of movement building: community mobilizing and community organizing. The former focused primarily on large-scale, short-term public events. This is the Movement of popular memory, best associated with the legacy of Dr. King. The organizing tradition, on the other hand, was animated by a sense of freedom eloquently summed up by Septima Clark as "broadening the scope of democracy to include everyone and deepening the concept to include every relationship." To this end, more emphasis was placed on the longer-term work of cultivating a sense of leadership, agency, and power of everyday people. The success of campaigns was judged more for how they facilitated the personal transformation of those involved than if they met particular tactical goals. The movement became a kind of training in democracy.

As they would arrive in town, SNCC organizers were often ignored or avoided by local people, often dismissively referred to as "dat mess." Even folks initially sympathetic to the movement simply had too much to lose by publicly affiliating with it. But the organizers dug themselves in, engaging the community, getting to know people and their struggles, building relationships. Slowly, impressed by their ideas, actions, character, and courage, some local people chose to cast their lot with the movement. Within a year, they would have the capacity to mobilize an entire town; even conservative local leaders felt obligated to express their support. When SNCC organizers



would leave town, they left behind lasting autonomous organizations led by local people, who otherwise would never would have thought of themselves as politically engaged. They transformed the South.

SNCC organizer Bob Moses was once asked how you organize a town. "By bouncing a ball," he responded. "You stand on a street corner and bounce a ball. Soon all the children come around. You keep on bouncing the ball. Before long it runs under someone's porch and you meet the adults."

SNCC often thought about organizing and building relationships interchangeably. Canvassing was the prototypical organizing act. It was the first step in engaging and developing relationships with those in the community not already sympathetic to the movement. Anyone who showed interest would be asked to become involved in a single, concrete task. This could be helping to plan a workshop or going canvassing themselves, but it often meant attending a mass meeting. Mass meetings were the means by which curiosity was cemented into commitment. Mass meetings borrowed their form from the Black church. Strategy and tactics were discussed, internal problems aired, educational lectures given, gospels sung, updates given on what was happening with the movement elsewhere. One of the major components of the mass meeting was folks publicly narrating their life story. Mass meetings helped break people out of their sense of isolation by showing them how many of their neighbors had also come out. Citizenship schools aimed to raise people's basic literacy skills to prepare them to register to vote, but they were taught using a radical pedagogical style that emphasized structural critique, Black

history, “community problem solving” (ie, direct action), and ultimately, subjective transformation. Other major tasks of organizing a town were *locating co-optable networks* (social networks already predisposed to movement values), and *developing informal leadership* (those in communities already holding informal leadership roles). Ultimately, this organizing allowed SNCC to move communities of ordinary people into sustained political action.

Much of what has become common sense in Occupy Wall Street and contemporary anarchism has its origins in SNCC. Skeptical of traditional organizations, SNCC experimented

with consensus decision making, horizontal structures, and group-centric leadership. They developed a kind of independent radicalism, untethered by dogmas or established political ideology. They developed a try-and-let’s-see style of organizing, open to experiments and learning from experience. To borrow a phrase from the Zapatistas, SNCC attempted to “walk while asking questions.” SNCC found their way out of their own impasse by shifting their emphasis from dramatic events to the steadier work of community organizing. It seems today that a similar shift is needed: toward radical community organizing.

# Punching the Clock

## Fragments on Work and Time

BY AN ANONYMOUS LABOR ORGANIZER

**C**onversations. Recently a friend and I were talking about our jobs. I work and organize in a large retail distribution center. He works precariously as a poet. We arrived at a question that faces all people selling their labor to live: what’s the relationship between working and fighting, between survival and freedom? He said to me: “My great-grandparents came to America so their son could be a janitor. Their son became a janitor so his daughter could be a nurse. His daughter became a nurse so that her son could be a poet.”

This hit home. I live with three generations of family. All of us used to live independently before moving together to support and sustain one another through a financial crisis that we know wasn’t our fault. Together, we’ve had time to share historical memories and expectations for the future, eroding the amnesia that is often enforced between generations. We’re reminding each other how the world has changed—and how it hasn’t—over the past 100 years. These conversations have been revolutionary for me.

Eternal Return. The gap between the 1% and everyone else is wider than it’s ever been. As the crisis continues indefinitely, those privileged to have a job ask ourselves: “Why have we punched the clock, day in and day out, year after year, willingly functioning in a system that’s designed to take everything away from us?” And leaders who speak in the name of workers should ask themselves, “Is it time to shift gears, alliances, and strategies?”

Just as we’re driven to cross oceans and deserts to find work, the fear of unemployment has driven us back in time. From a historical standpoint, what is old looks new again. And we have ended up where we started. Progress has been a round trip. Always fighting from a defensive position, working

class organizations have failed to produce our own vision of the future. We have failed to combat the holograms of freedom that keep us in debt, playing the game over and over again. For all we’ve sacrificed in blood, sweat and tears, we remain afraid to take up the labor of imagination necessary to envision our liberation. So we return.

New Revolutionaries? In sectors where unions have not existed, the first skirmishes of a new movement are being won by those who have nothing to lose. Like a blast from the revolutionary past, communities of low-wage workers, many newly arrived from the Global South, are doing in their own ways what earlier waves of immigrant workers did when they arrived a century ago from Europe and the American South. They are meeting in churches and apartments and community spaces, learning to organize and laying the groundwork for a concerted mobilization of power from below. In the 1930s, the new American rank-and-file had become massive and militant. The burden of fear was shifting from workers to capitalists. The system is starting to shake again. We can feel it.

Back to the Future The Bosses and the leaders held things together through law, through contracts, through compromises, through peace-treaties. Episodes of militancy from below were suppressed and forgotten. Energies were directed into dreams of prosperity, stability, upward mobility. As dreams crumble, our memories are unlocked. Out of necessity, we must shed fear and refuse the divisions manufactured by the system to keep us apart—especially between citizens and the undocumented. This extends to the relationship between generations. The old and the young, the dead and the unborn must be part of our movement. As we paint our shared dreams onto the open canvas of future, we must ensure that the institutions that we are creating on the ground do not allow themselves to become fossilized. Only when our histories remain alive can we smash the clock that always returns to the same time—the time of the Bosses.



# Questions with John Holloway

## **What do cracks look like?**

We can start with Tidal. What does it look like? It's a walking in the wrong direction, bringing together other walkings in the wrong direction. It's a negation-and-creation. The world points in one direction, tells us that for something to be meaningful it must generate money, profit. And we say No and walk in the opposite direction, doing what we consider to be desirable and necessary, generating a meaning that has nothing to do with money. It is a refusal to conform to the rule of capital and, at the same time, a creation of something else, a self-determination. We say No and sow what could be the seeds of a different world.

Of course it is not just Tidal. It is all those attempts to go against the logic of capital and do something else instead. These may be big (like the Occupy movement or the Zapatistas), medium (a social centre, a factory occupation), small (a group of friends deciding to dedicate themselves to alternative farming, or a revolutionary party of average size), even tiny (a kiss, perhaps). They may be spatial (Zuccotti Square), temporal (a week of rioting) or dedicated to a specific activity (free rides on public transport, campaigning against the privatisation of water). The important thing in the first instance is not to judge, but to recognise: to recognise that the world is full of cracks, that being human is a constant moving against a dehumanising system. It is only when we see that anti-capitalism is deeply rooted in the experience of living in a capitalist society that it makes sense to talk of creating a different world.

## **How do we connect the cracks?**

The way we disconnect the cracks is by the great left tradition of sectarianism, by saying "that's the wrong way, follow us and we'll show you how!" I don't mean that we shouldn't discuss and criticise and suggest, but it has to be in the context of understanding that we are all trying to

create paths that do not exist in order to create a society that does not exist, or rather that exists only as not-yet, in the many different paths that are pushing against-and-beyond capitalism.

We connect the cracks in lots of different ways, above all by promoting their mutual recognition as cracks. This is what Tidal is trying to do, what this interview is trying to do, this is what songs and theatre and books do. I think it is more helpful to think of resonances than of institutional connections. Institutions generally promote boredom and stagnation.

## **What is revolution today?**

Desperately urgent. If we do not break the dynamic of capital, the world will become a nastier and nastier place and it is very possible that humans will not survive for very long.

## **What is the relation between a moment of rupture and the process of revolution?**

The difficulty is that we cannot be sure what a revolution looks like. The concept that dominated in the last century, that of taking state power and then transforming society, did not work and in some cases led to horrendous results. We have to separate the idea of revolution from that of taking state power. Revolutionary change is more urgent than ever, but it is not through capturing state power that we can bring it about. I find it helpful to think in terms of three of the Zapatista sayings.

First (of course) ¡Ya basta! Enough! We have reached the limit of what we will accept. We cannot think of a future revolution, revolution must be here and now. In the cracks we assume here and now our responsibility for the world. It cannot be a question of incremental change through reforms which may improve situations but do nothing to break the capitalist dynamic of destruction. Break, break now, break by living the world we want to create.

Secondly, preguntando caminamos: Asking we walk. We walk asking because we do not know the way and also because asking-discussing is a process of collective determination, and collective determination is the way. Thirdly, caminamos, no corremos, porque vamos muy lejos: We walk, we do not run, because we are going very far. This is not postponement, quite the contrary. There is a reversal of the traditional temporalities of revolution. The old idea was of revolution in the future, which would then change things dramatically. Now we think rather of rupture here and now (with a resounding crack!) which opens the arduous and often slow process of creating a different world, always pushing against-and-beyond that which exists. So: a Tidal wave of ruptures, growing to the point where capitalism is swept aside.

### **How might the city become an arena of revolutionary practice?**

It is, isn't it? Go out and look. Sit down with your friends (if such you have), try to see how many cracks you can see in your neighbourhood and write to Tidal with the results ■

# ON LOVE, LOSS AND MOVEMENT

### **We came to the park in mourning.**

We had lost so much. We turned mourning into militancy and felt awakened. We discovered that all was not past, that there was a present in which we might live. We cracked history open, and time seemed full. Everything was happening in the Now.

Then came the eviction, and we were dispersed. In the aftermath of the park, we mourn what was lost. We know that we can never fully separate from it. It is inside us, it haunts us, it speaks to us. We are bound by it. But it does not tie us down to the past. The beloved whispers: "you must learn to live. Now."

This means letting go of that perfect future where all the wrongs will be right. That future will always be postponed, not yet open, unavailable--and thus an object of melancholic sadness in advance. We do not wait and lament.

The storms of Wall Street are unrelenting. It is what they call progress. There is no shelter, no park, where we can ride this out. We have to learn to live in the open. There comes a moment when we know that we can't go on. But we go on. It's easy to break up. To continue with love is hard.

**Don't be afraid. Don't look back.**





# Colonizer as Lender

## Free Palestine, Occupy Wall Street, Strike Debt

BY FOLKS IN OCCUPY WALL STREET  
AND STRIKE DEBT

Right in the place where empire was scheming to do its worst, a tent went up—and then another, and then a village. A new community was born there, an act of resistance as well as a nurturing space for eating and sleeping and living. People talked and prayed together. There was an explosion of hope in the midst of hopelessness. But before long the empire had enough. It sent in its army of militarized police, and the village was destroyed.

This is the story of Occupy Wall Street's Liberty Square in the fall of 2011, yes. But it is also what happened earlier this year in the West Bank. The village of Bab al-Shams, whose name means "Gate of the Sun," appeared early in the morning on January 11. Two days later, in the dark of night, Israeli soldiers tore it down.

Bab al-Shams was located in the area known as E1, which the Israeli government had recently designated for the expansion of the Maale Adumim settlement, effectively closing off Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and dividing a land and a people from itself. The announcement came in retaliation for the affirmation of Palestinian representation at the United Nations. There, the vast majority of countries in the world voted to grant what Israel has for decades denied: the rights of Palestinians to sovereignty and participation in the international community.

The people who built Bab al-Shams sought to challenge the "facts on the ground" by which Israel has been gradually removing those who inhabit and cultivate Palestinian land. With the help of billions of dollars in military and economic aid from the United States government each year, and relying on a steady influx of U.S. investors and settlers, this slow creep of expansion and expulsion reenacts our own country's bloody history. There are many ways in which the circumstances of Bab al-Shams differ from those of Liberty Square, but both encampments rose up from the ground to oppose the same imperial appetite for growth. The past, present, and future of the United States and Palestine are bound together.

Palestine today is a land and a people caught in a stranglehold. Israel controls all trade, borders, movement of people, airspace, water, electricity, and other vital resources, and it polices the occupied territories through unlawful means: military rule, arbitrary detention, land seizure, settlement-building. A critical, and much less publicized, ingredient of Israeli policy today is the Palestinian debt trap, which represents both a means of repression and a prospect for liberation.

The public debt of the Palestinian Authority is approaching \$5 billion—as much as 70 percent of GDP—and more than \$1 billion of that is external debt. For an economy still heavily dependent on foreign aid, this volume of public-sector indebtedness is alarming. Household debt has also skyrocketed, largely because relatively new bank lending programs are being used to finance homes, cars, marriages, computers, and educations. So, like almost everywhere else, an ever larger share of personal income and government revenue is being swallowed up by debt service. All over the globe, debts are imposed and manipulated for the sake of social control, but this is all the more true for a people under siege in a struggle for self-determination.

The Paris Protocol of 1994 dictates that Israel must collect and fairly distribute revenue from Palestinian taxes and custom duties. In violation of the agreement, it regularly withholds these funds as punishment for resistance activity—particularly when identified with Hamas—and also as a way to capture Palestinian debts owed to Israeli enterprises. The value of these debts is magnified by the charging of exorbitant Israeli prices for utilities, fuel, and other necessities, even though Palestinians' incomes and employment levels are lower by a third or more. In these ways and others, Israel not only profits lavishly from supplying Palestine but also wields direct discipline through its automatic powers of debt extraction. It can turn the spigot of fiscal pain on or off at will.

Less direct is the role of the Palestinian Authority, which, like most forms of colonial "self-rule," has an acutely



schizophrenic personality. In its most recent manifestation, under the neoliberal regime of ex-World Bank economist Salam Fayyad, the PA has encouraged the debt-financing of basic needs by relaxing the lending requirements of Palestinian banks. In Ramallah, where highly paid NGO employees compete with government officials in the marketplace for villas and luxury automobiles, locals talk of a “bubble” economy, driven by a cappuccino lifestyle that claims to fulfill the new Palestinian Dream. Material goods and luxuries that are commonplace for Israelis on the other side of the Green Line are sustained, for Palestinians, by a debt burden that stifles political dissent. Those who enjoy certain privileges from serving in the colonial administration stand to lose them if they do not assist in suppressing the insurgencies of fellow Palestinians.

The Fayyad administration has also embarked on a program of “state readiness,” grooming Palestine for sovereignty according to the template required by global capitalist institu-

self-disciplining asset, arguably more effective than any instrument of military pacification. Those in the Gaza Strip, the villages, and the refugee camps are more directly disciplined. They are ground down by austerity based in a perceived scarcity that’s as artificial as the GDP growth numbers, which are borne aloft by the contributions of international donors.

The psychology of debt impels us to think at every level about who and what Palestinians owe. But since we refuse to value fellow human beings by their relationship to capital, we should be asking the opposite question. We owe to Palestinians at least what we demand for ourselves: freedom from occupation, freedom from new forms of colonization, freedom to return to, inhabit, and live in a territory which we or our parents and grandparents called home, without annexation, without financialization, without exclusion, without pollution, and without the destruction of the common resources that nurture and sustain life.

انطلاقاً من الرغبة لتحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية وتضامناً مع الشعب الفلسطيني، نقاطع، ونعاقب ونسحب استثماراتنا من الذين يربحون ويستفيدون من حفظ الفلسطينيين في عبودية الديون. وذلك تعبيراً عن تضامننا مع أولئك الموجودون في تلك العبودية. في رفضنا تكمن محبتنا. المحبة الثورية.

tions. To qualify for statehood in the neoliberal global order, a nation must show that it can attract investors to its government bonds. Preparing for sovereign debtworthiness involves jumping through hoops laid out by the IMF and the World Bank: public austerity, unrestricted access to foreign investors, deregulated markets. Also implied in this courtship is permitting these institutions to override elected governments and set policy directly, either to ensure that foreign bondholders are paid in full or to quell political instability. Meanwhile, Israel’s expanding settlements in the West Bank make a mockery of the ever more elusive Palestinian state, dangled still as a seductive promise before the PA bureaucrats.

So who benefits from this debt trap? In Israel, the greatest beneficiaries are the supplier firms, the brokers of colonial power, and those sectors among the population who materially benefit from the occupation. In Palestine, it is the bankers and business elites who stand to profit, either from extractive lending or from the land and commodity markets financed by the loans. International beneficiaries range from the would-be creditors of a new capitalist client state, to the geopolitical power-brokers who favor the current “stability” of the occupation, with its bantustans strategically isolated by Israeli settlements and paramilitary infrastructure.

And what of the Palestinians who are caught in the trap? For the affluent few, the possession of debt is a sign of status, one of the trappings of modernization—but it is also a

Freedom and social justice are intrinsically collective. They require us to recognize as well as traverse the divisions that perpetuate oppression. This, however, did not appear to be the case for the 2011 protest encampments set up by Israelis in Tel Aviv in 2011. Although these “occupiers” proclaimed their solidarity with a global movement against austerity and debt, Palestinian voices and grievances were not welcomed. How are we to understand a call for social justice or solidarity when the worst forms of oppression in one’s own midst are not addressed?

Out of a desire for social justice and solidarity, we boycott, divest from, and sanction those who profit from keeping Palestinians in the limbo of debt. We express our bond with those in bondage by these acts of refusal. These acts of refusal are also acts of love. Militant love. There will be no peace or justice in Palestine until the outstanding debt to its people is recognized and paid through a mutual and collective struggle for justice, liberation, and autonomy. ■





ULIN  
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ACFT  
N 33'58'32  
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N 33'57'18  
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BAG 210  
PNG 4x13KM  
ANG 1,137M  
THO 50H  
ELV 3436F

# WALL STREET, WAR STREET, DEBT MACHINE

BY  
**MICHAEL  
HARDT**

To organize against the debt society in the US today we have to find a way also to challenge the war machine. The war business is a permanent profit maker for Wall Street. It is hard to find a major bank or corporation that is not deeply engaged in weapons production or military supply. And one of the prime objects of so many wars is to open markets for them and secure their access to resources. Wall Street can't let war come to an end. There's too much money in it.

War funds are raised primarily through debt. The enormous financial costs of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, have swelled the national debt, and such war

debt translates directly into personal and social debt. The more money spent on military and security projects, the less the government spends on education, housing, and health care, and thus the more people have to go into debt to maintain the basics of their lives.

War debt, like many other forms of public debt, serves as a huge funnel that pours money from the 99% into the pockets of the rich.

The suffering in the US caused by this war machine and its debts is dwarfed, of course, by that of those in the global South, measured in part by the lives lost and communities torn apart. (During the Vietnam War it was common to note how the global color lines coincided with where the bombs were falling – and the geographies of today's wars are certainly no less racist.) But the suffering of those in subordinate countries also results from local military regimes and the systems of military aid and indebtedness that support them, as well as the nonstate militias that are also happily supplied by the global arms market.

So when you hear about troop withdrawals from Iraq or Afghanistan, don't be fooled into thinking that war is yesterday's issue or that the US war machine is declining or that you can expect a peace dividend next year. The United States is engaged in a "long war," a seemingly permanent military project for which Osama Bin Laden or Al Qaeda or the Taliban or Saddam Hussein temporarily serve as the prime targets but are really stand-ins for a more vaguely defined enemy and much broader objectives. Sometimes this war takes the form of open

Indeed, debt organizing also has the potential to create an expansive platform that links together a wide range of struggles -- from education to precarious labor and from housing and medical care to racial hierarchies. Even that network, though, risks being limited to the national scene. Adding the war and security regime to the mix is one way to insure that our actions and analyses also engage transnational and global frameworks.

combat but often is conducted by drones, bombing campaigns, peace-keeping forces, surveillance at home and abroad, and myriad other means.

Today's war machine is driven by three primary logics, which are all constantly present and mixed together in different proportions. First is the old-fashioned imperialist logic, most closely identified with neoconservatives, founded on the dream that the United States, through its economic, political, and military power, can not only defeat enemies but also create new political and social orders, reshaping nations, regions, and ultimately the global environment.

Second, the neoliberal war doctrine, less noisy than its neoconservative cousin and seldom stated openly, defines national interest primarily in term of access to resources and markets -- and ultimately corporate profits. Oil and minerals are not treated simply as the loot of the victors, but the strategic planning and rationales of military actions always involve calculations about access and ownership.

Finally, always part of the mix is also the humanitarian war doctrine, a social democratic logic by which the US military intervention, often as part of a (at least nominally) multi-lateral force, is charged with toppling dictators, preventing genocide, thwarting terrorists, and other noble tasks. Such imperial war projects for the good of humanity do indeed in many cases target odious and repressive regimes and groups, but I argue that even if we were to assume its virtuous intentions the US military (or that of France or any of the other dominant powers acting separately or together) lacks any real capacities to benefit those it claims to save -- but that's a discussion we'll have to save for another time.

The Clintons (Bill and Hillary both) have often appeared as primary spokespeople for humanitarian war, just as Bush

and Cheney stand for a mix of neoconservative and neoliberal logics, but really humanitarian war always activates neoliberal and neoconservative logics, and vice versa. The differences are a matter of proportion and emphasis.

But, you respond, isn't Obama different? Didn't he campaign in 2008 on withdrawal from Iraq, closing Guantanamo, and ending torture (while, of course, pledging a surge in Afghanistan)? I'm hesitant to hazard a guess at any politician's true beliefs -- if they really have such things. More powerful than Obama, though, is the office he occupies, which is fully embedded in the war machine.

War protest in the US today has the added benefit of extending the vision and action of debt organizing to a global level through common struggles and networks of solidarity. One great virtue of debt activism is how rooted it is in the local realities of peoples lives, but it can't be effective if it remains only on such a small scale. Indeed debt organizing also has the potential to create an expansive platform that links together a wide range of struggles -- from education to precarious labor and from housing and medical care to racial hierarchies. Even that network, though, risks being limited to the national scene. Adding the war and security regime to the mix is one way to insure that our actions and analyses also engage transnational and global frameworks.

There are many reasons to oppose the US war machine, with its complex of military and security operations, installations, and institutions. It is a killing machine, a racist machine, a misery machine, and much more. It's also a debt machine, and thus perhaps, when engaged together with other contemporary issues posed by debt, a movement can also begin to erode the foundations for our seemingly permanent state of war. ■



# Commoning Against Debt

BY SILVIA FEDERICI

Debt, as David Graeber reminds us, has a long history. Debtors' revolts dotted the ancient world forcing the introduction of Jubilees. In modern times, debt has become a key means of capital accumulation. Ubiquitous, it has taken on a new function, as the most general category through which exploitation is organized. This pervasive use of debt is an attempt to change the architecture of capital accumulation by eliminating its most conflictual aspects and allowing for self-managed exploitation. This is one of the objectives of the "financialization of reproduction." In the place of the capital-labor relation mediated by the wage, banks and NGOs are dishing out to would-be micro-entrepreneurs the capital that presumably will lift them out of poverty. They then recede, only to reappear at the point of collection. Users of credit cards, student loans and micro-loans appear as possessors of "capital," even if just a few hundred dollars, presumably free to invest it as they please and prosper or fail as their industriousness allows. In this scenario, as wages and jobs vanish and the lending/debt machine becomes the dominant work relation, exploitation is more individualized and guilt producing.

The functioning of this machine is best seen in the organization of micro-credit, which the policy international agencies have promoted since the 1980's as the favored means to capture the work, energies, and inventiveness of the "poor" across the world.

Loans are generally lent to women's groups. While each member is responsible for repayment, the group polices anyone who defaults. This has proven to be such an effective mechanism that even though the recipients are the poorest, the rates of repayment have been the highest.

Equally important have been the strategies used in case of default. Banks and NGOs have engaged in an ethnography of shame, studying how communities enforce their mores, which they then apply with a good dose of intimidation. Home visits and vilifying methods are used to scare people into repayment. This further explains why rates are so high, despite the fact that few can claim any success with the capital borrowed. In fact, most loan recipients simply move from a smaller to a bigger debt, in a sequence often ending in suicide.

**"In modern times, debt has become a key means of capital accumulation. Ubiquitous, it has taken on a new function, as the most general category through which exploitation is organized. This pervasive use of debt is an attempt to change the architecture of capital accumulation by eliminating its most conflictual aspects and allowing for self-managed exploitation."**

That micro-credit is producing misery is becoming common knowledge. Nevertheless, the program is expanding, projected to reach 30 million people in Africa alone. "Good returns" on the money invested is only one of the motivations. A further reason is the desire to bring under the control of the banks forms of subsistence that populations of women have created at the margins of the money economy. Debt sucks an immense amount of surplus labor expended outside the wage relation, while providing a means of experimentation with different social relations. Surveillance and policing are 'internalized' by the community, and failure is more burning since it is experienced as an individual problem and disgrace.

On this terrain the women of Egypt, Bangladesh or Bolivia share the same experience as indebted university students in the U.S.. In both cases the state and employers are eliminated as beneficiaries of the labor extracted, and as targets of demands and conflict. In both cases we have the ideology of micro-entrepreneurship, the individualization of the reasons for success and failure, the breakdown of collective support and, not last, the politics of guilt: hiding, self-imposed silence, avoidance of disclosure.

However, this curtain of fear and guilt is beginning to be lifted. Debt resistance movements are growing in different parts of the world. While in the United States students and those fighting foreclosures have taken the lead, in the South resistance has come from grassroots women,

like the hundreds who in the summer of 2002 converged in La Paz and besieged the banks demanding a cancellation of their debts. But the struggle against micro-credits is not waged only through demonstrations. The main obstacle to the spread of micro-credits are the commoning activities women in rural areas and shanty towns are creating, as they are pooling resources, setting up communal kitchens, occupying public spaces where to conduct various forms of micro-trade and urban farming, and forming community organizations to address the problems of everyday reproduction. Through these activities and the solidarity networks they generate—which parallel the solidarity economies developing across the United States—the new debt economy is being resisted, while a new society, based on the communalization of our reproduction, is being created. ■

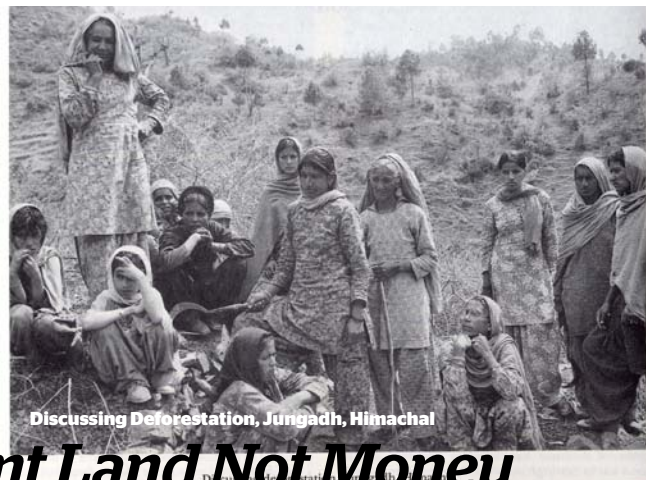


Gheraoing district government officials, Junagadh, Himachal

## Gherao

Owing to its popularity and intensity as a new method of labour action, the word “gherao” meaning “encirclement” a word originally from Bengali, got inducted into the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, in 2004. On page 598 it has the following entry: “Gherao: n (pl. gheraos). Indian; a protest in which workers prevent employers leaving a place of work until demands are met. Usually, a group of people would surround a politician or a government building until their demands are met, or answers given.

# A HISTORY



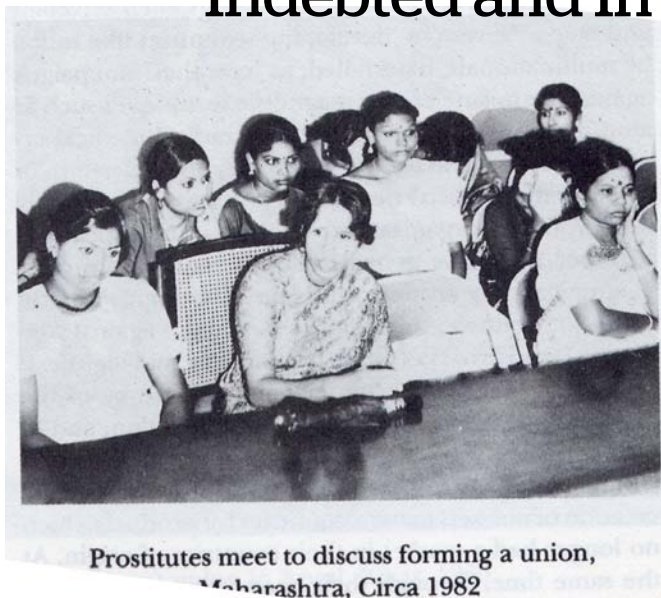
Discussing Deforestation, Junagadh, Himachal

## *We Want Land Not Money*

## Indebted and In Debt

Among the ones who were most active in the movement, the women apparently played the most militant role. They led the demonstrations, invented and shouted militant slogans, sang revolutionary songs and mobilized the masses. They went from hut to hut to agitate people, to persuade them of the necessity to join the struggle. In the negotiations with the landlords they proved to be more adamant than the others.

As their militancy developed in the movement, particular issues began to be raised by them, following a pattern we have seen earlier and will see again and again: where a community expresses consciousness of its own oppression as a community through a protest movement in which the so-called weaker subjects are acknowledged to be active; at a certain stage these subjects apply this consciousness to questions of their oppression as a sex, a race, a body. Interestingly, some people in this movement raised the same question as some people in the previous revolutionary movements had done: the problem of wife-beating.



Prostitutes meet to discuss forming a union, Maharashtra, Circa 1982

Not-forgetting, the rich tradition, yet, how to reproduce my life differently from my own mother's?

How do matters stand between feminists in the academy, and feminists on the street? How to not reinforce the separation?

# DOING

BY JESAL KAPADIA  
INSPIRED BY A BOOK WRITTEN BY RADHA KUMAR



# Bonded Debt and the Plundering of Our Cities

BY ANN LARSON

“**T**here’s the United States and there’s Moody’s Bond Rating Service. The United States can destroy you by dropping bombs, and Moody’s can destroy you by downgrading your bonds. And believe me, it’s not clear sometimes who’s more powerful.”

The year is 1996, and the speaker is Thomas Friedman, warmonger and breathless cheerleader for neo-liberalism. He declares that the new global superpower is a bond credit ratings agency.

To make some sense of this, we need to jump back nearly a century. It’s 1909, European financial imperialists have been purchasing bonds for nearly four hundred years; the U.S. bond market is already several times larger than that of any other country. Power is shifting. John Moody, a financial analyst from New Jersey, invents a revolutionary technique for assessing railroad securities. He establishes a private firm, Moody’s Bond Rating Service. An empire is born.

Today, bonds are a multi-trillion dollar market, and ratings agencies like Moody’s and S&P play a central role in maintaining the global debt economy. They do it by producing reports on the creditworthiness of cities and public authorities.

How does that translate to power?

The Keynesian era of public funding is long past. In cities across the US, infrastructure has been left to rot, and federal support for urban development has been replaced by debt. Towns and municipalities must fend for themselves. Resources, from health care to electricity, are increasingly controlled by banks that underwrite the bonds cities need to survive. Agencies, in collaboration with banks, determine which cities will make good on their debt. It’s quite simple, really. Control the money, control the city, control the people.

Unsurprisingly, this has led to disaster, time and again. Take Scranton, PA, which in 2012 threatened to default on a bond. Moody’s retaliated with a punitive credit downgrade, one of the ‘bombs’ so giddily referenced by Friedman. In response, Scranton obediently sliced the wages of public employees down to minimum wage. All hail the credit score. Or take Stockton, CA, which is battling with creditors over pensions for public workers. Or New Jersey, which has one of the highest numbers of junk-rated municipalities in the nation, a fatal blow for communities like Camden that have already endured four decades of economic crisis.

Let’s be clear: this is not just a matter of greed. The federal government actively formalizes the power of ratings agencies. Once firms issue their ratings, regulatory officials use those assessments to determine which municipalities can sell bonds

to which investors. Ratings agencies, then, make enormous profits by assuring that cities comply with regulations that they helped codify in the first place. The municipal bond market is a blatant collaboration between the government and the finance industry to privatize the commons.

Bond ratings agencies further control our lives through the disciplining apparatus of the credit score. The restructuring of the US economy requires that municipalities compete with each other to attract buyers for bonds. Institutions, such as pension funds, are the fastest growing investor category. By law, though, such institutions cannot purchase high percentages of low-grade debt. Municipalities that issue bonds are under enormous pressure to maintain good credit. Countless cities around the US are one downgrade away from becoming a Scranton or a Camden, a form of financial terrorism by the 1%.

What can we do? This age of austerity requires a social movement in which we refuse to pay illegitimate debt.

Our struggle is guided by some key questions.

Which debts are legitimate and which are not? Would we rather fund schools and hospitals or pay debt service to Wall Street? Do the profits of international investors outweigh the right of pensioners to retire with dignity or the right of students to attend well-funded schools? What kind of world do we want to live in?

Communities around the country are already challenging banks and ratings agencies. Oakland, CA, is fighting to cancel interest rate swaps with Goldman Sachs, a courageous step that guarantees a shredded credit rating for years to come. Baltimore, a city where 80% of school children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, is lead plaintiff in a lawsuit to recover money lost as a result of the rigging of LIBOR, the mechanism that determines many interest rates. Taking a cue from the community debt audits underway in Europe, activists in Chicago are working to identify illegitimate debts on municipal balance sheets with an eye toward organizing debt refusal campaigns. In NYC, where the minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour, it will soon cost as much as \$5 for a round-trip subway or bus ride. A coalition called No Fare Hikes is rolling out a fare refusal campaign and declaring that public transportation is a right.

As the debt-resistance movement gains momentum across the United States, we must continuously connect the dots between personal debt and municipal debt—they are two sides of the same oppression.

To the banks and the ratings agencies that plunder our cities, we say, We owe you nothing!

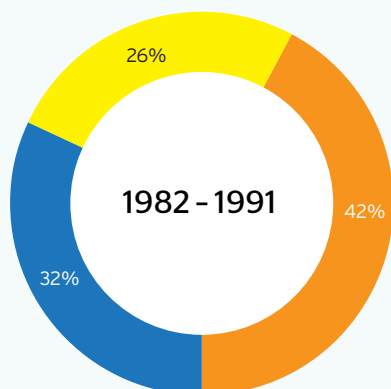
To our neighborhoods and communities, we say, Reclaim what is already yours! ■

# A Case Study in Municipal Debt

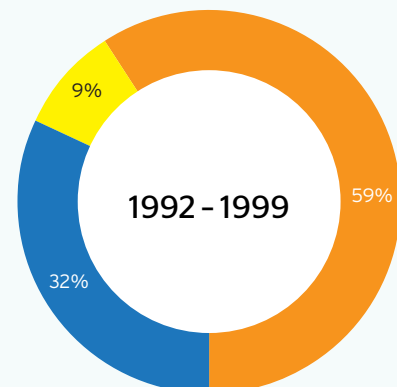
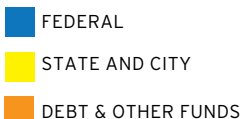
## The MTA

1981

MTA Chairman Richard Ravitch persuades the New York State Legislature to allow the MTA to issue bonds.

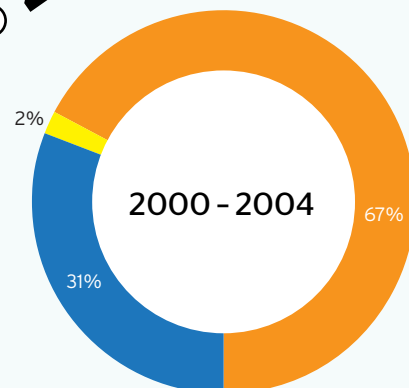


### MTA Capital Plan Funding



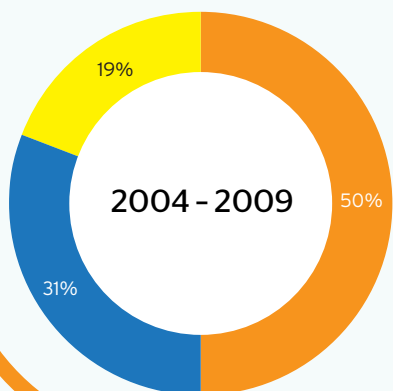
2000

The MTA undergoes a refinancing of its debt. Bear Stearns, the chief architect of the plan and underwriter of the bonds, reaps tens of millions of dollars from the plan.

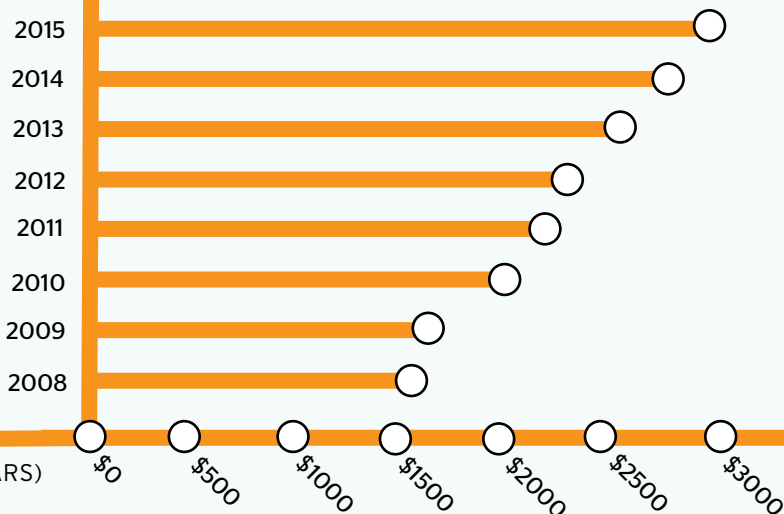


2008

Long retired from government, Richard Ravitch is brought in to lead a commission to essentially rescue New York State from bankruptcy. The final report recommends a 7.5% increase in MTA fares and tolls every two years, a policy the State Legislature readily adopts.



### Debt Service Payments



(MILLIONS OF DOLLARS)





# ALL STORMS

## On the Margins of Disaster, Revolutionary Acts of Care

BY NASTARAN MOHRIT

**O**n the morning of October 30th 2012, residents of the Rockaway Peninsula awoke to a virtual wasteland. After a harrowing night riding out 60-mph winds and the flooding of virtually every inch of the entire 11-mile peninsula, devastated community members peered out onto unrecognizable streets strewn with flooded cars, 15-foot pieces of the shattered Rockaway boardwalk, jagged piles of debris and mountains of sand.

Hurricane Sandy tore through a community devastated by the man-made disaster of capitalism, situated only 20 miles from its command center, Wall Street. Hurricane Sandy forced a microscope on an area historically underserved, pushed to the margins, and labeled a dumping ground for New York's dispossessed — the formerly incarcerated, elderly, mentally ill, and drug-dependent.

After decades of systematic neglect, marked by crumbling, underfunded city hospitals, inadequate for-profit clinics, and limited service providers, the entire health care

infrastructure of the Rockaway peninsula was decimated in Sandy's path. Chronic conditions intimately connected to socio-economic factors of unemployment, diet, stress, environmental pollution, and inadequate health care were only exasperated by the storms' destruction. At every turn, on every block, the script read the same: asthma, hypertension, diabetes, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, addiction. Everywhere we looked, people were suffering.

Scrambling to fill the void, YANA (You are Never Alone) Medical Clinic was erected out of pure necessity and built upon the simplest of principles: to provide free medical care to all who walked through its doors, no questions asked. Within its walls, and without fully grasping what we had created at the time, a beautiful space opened up. Volunteer nurses and doctors from hospitals across the city and state partnered with Rockaway residents, Occupiers, and street medics to provide immediate medical care to the surrounding community.

Set up in the unlikelyst of locations—a former fur shop

**When Hurricane Sandy struck, Wall Street's climate disaster came home to roost. The city was shut down. The banks were underwater. And though we all got flooded, the vulnerable suffered most. We know we are further paying for the crimes of Wall Street. In the absence of the state, the people stepped to fill the void. We declared a Peoples Emergency.**

offered in kind by a sympathetic landlord--the clinic served as one of the only operational health care facilities peninsula-wide. Left to fend for themselves in adult homes, shoddy halfway houses and SRO (Single Room Occupancy) buildings, many of YANA's first patients were elderly, drug dependent and/or mentally ill, completely severed from access to their healthcare providers and critical medications. We treated these patients with the same care we would our own family members.

Void of the constraints, bureaucracy and red tape of agencies and organizations who clumsily attempted to navigate the post-disaster landscape, volunteers structured a disaster response that served the needs of the community first and asked questions last. Within days, we discovered with shock and numbness that both FEMA and the American Red Cross were referring residents to YANA. In this space, where some of the most egregious breakdowns at the city, state and federal level occurred, medical and mental health professionals staffed a free clinic, canvassed pitch black high-rise buildings (armed with headlamps, intake forms and prescription pads), and combed the Rockaway peninsula block-by-block to deliver services to thousands of residents without power, heat, food or water. Volunteers not only provided a compassionate voice on the other side of the door to terrified and isolated residents, they offered desperately needed services at one of the relief effort's most critical junctures.

No longer hamstrung by the same bureaucracy and red-tape of their own professions, volunteers were able to serve the needs of patients above all other considerations. They were not incapacitated in their role and responsibility as healers based on their patients' financial limitations or lack of coverage, allowing them to serve on the front lines in a way they had never thought possible. They felt a sense of pride and purpose in their work that had long been stolen from them by a system that refuses by its very nature to acknowledge its own barbaric ineptitude. What they found in those spaces changed them in lasting and immeasurable ways.

# LEAD TO

The Rockaway community thanked us from the bottom of their hearts. What they may not have known is how much their perseverance day in and day out inspired each and every one of us to continue our work.

While Sandy revealed and reaffirmed this system's inhumanity, it has paradoxically opened up a transformative space for us to assert our own humanity. Occupy Sandy demonstrated for us--in the provision of some of the most basic and essential services necessary for a healthy society--that our human potential is both immense and realizable if we so choose. In the Rockaways, expressing our potential to care for one another was in itself a revolutionary act. Even amidst the heartbreaking destruction and loss surrounding us, the glimpses of a kinder, saner, more just world served as a reminder and inspiration for us all to fight for that world together.

What we build based on those experiences is entirely up to us.



# WALL STREET





# From the Far Rockaways

Photo: Tracie Williams, Sofia Gallisá Muriente

My life was hard before the storm.

Living without heat or hot water wasn't a new experience, it just made me shift gears into a familiar survival mode. Still, a lot is different about this disaster in comparison to other rough times in my life. Until Sandy hit my hometown in the Rockaways, I never realized how many nice people

were out there willing to come to an unfamiliar place and help out strangers. Then they stayed day by day until they were a part of that community. My friends in school were worried about me; they only saw the images of 16-foot waves, fire and destruction. The fact that I stayed home for the storm and that my phone was useless just added to their worries.

One day my dad took me to the community center that had recently opened down the block from my house to volunteer. YANA (You Are Never Alone) and Occupy Sandy created an opportunity for me to be useful to others and make a change in my neighborhood. I'm not the type to just take things for free and leave, so I kept coming back to work and at the end of the day I knew I could take whatever I needed. Helping people in times of need felt great, and meeting all the people I've met in the last three months has helped open my mind to all kinds of new ideas.

It's time for change! Not just for my neighborhood, but for myself.

BY ALBERT CARCATERRA  
18 YEARS OLD



YANA Community Center, Beach 113th and Rockaway Blvd.

Photo: Tracie Williams



# Climate changed us

BY SOFÍA GALLISÁ MURIENTE

Even though we've seen the National Guard, the Red Cross, and Doctors without Borders come out of the TV and into our streets. Even though we've walked through blocks covered in sand and measured ourselves against the unimaginably high flood lines on the side of every building. Even though we've found ourselves in the midst of an ever-changing reality that gets more complicated each day and that we feel more and more unequipped to deal with.

Who are we? How did we end up here? What is this? How will we ever leave?

Houses full of water and sand. Lives, work, memories, and histories packed in bulging trash bags. Piercing cold, darkness, coughing, laughable FEMA checks, and piles of debris on every sidewalk. Cell phones full of videos of flood, fire, and floating cars. Stories re-told time and time again in search of answers and comfort.

Some call it a natural disaster. We see a human disaster.

The real disaster is government neglect, poverty and marginalization. Those that have suffered the most from Sandy were not just victims to a terrible tide surge, they're those that fell through the cracks in the aftermath and have yet to access significant resources and support. They also happen to be the ones that had already been left behind before the storm.

More than anything else, it's the protagonists of the stories and histories we come across that reveal the true magnitude of the crisis. In the Rockaways, they're often an amalgam of people long ago deemed invaluable to society and pushed out to the limits of the city. For many residents, Sandy is not the worst thing that's happened in their lives, and their ability to cope is in large part due to a lifetime of struggle and survival. Some of our neighbors are mentally ill, handicapped, or have crippling addictions. Many are ex-convicts and even more rely on welfare or pensions. Human warehouses extend throughout the peninsula. There are homes full of seniors, basements full of undocumented immigrants, high-rises full of poor black and brown people.

Residents remind us constantly of the pre-existing crisis in the Rockaways. A local teenager yells at a journalist, "Don't

photograph that house, it's been like that for years!". But FEMA isn't concerned with these abandoned structures or abusive slumlords. "It's not within their mandate." The Red Cross can't do anything about it either, as they explicitly said one day when asking us to send them "clients." But the truth is we can't imagine a recovery that doesn't address the harsh realities of those living in the Rockaways. It seems criminal to clean out the sand, the mold and debris- the visible trail of destruction, and ignore the invisible structural violence that has long been rotting the foundations of this community.

First, climate changed us. Then, we changed the climate.

Whatever felt abstract about our shared sense of disenfranchisement and indignation is no longer a hindrance. Urgency has been made more tangible. The systemic failure is now undeniable. It's a war zone in our backyard (and our front yard, even our bedrooms and basements).

In the first weeks, Rockaway Park was buzzing with activity. Neighbors were on the street rediscovering each other, trading in old resentments for new memories of solidarity. Sharing what they had. Helping however they could. Taking on all sorts of roles and responsibilities, without asking or announcing. Watching familiar faces all around do the same.

Our amorphous political network reacted instinctively to the devastation and found itself in a unique position: a nightmare scenario that demanded ideals we had ferociously defended be put into practice. As it turns out, dealing with this disaster was not unlike the work we had been doing previously; in the end, capitalism is the crisis. The tide surge is the same for everyone, but class lines delineate who recovers and how. We went from protesters to relief workers, or maybe just narrowed the distance between the two. We went from trouble-makers to problem-solvers, from negation to affirmation, from antagonism to collaboration. Without time to talk about our politics, we infused them into our every action.

Conversations between "volunteers" and "the community" started with a strange mix of embarrassment and pride, with gentle empathy and the aching reminder of loss. It did not take long to learn each other's names (the duct tape name tags helped) but before that we were already a sea of strangers constantly embracing each other. Before we knew it, we were also neighbors, friends, and family.

Many of them weren't comfortable asking for help, and many of us weren't used to feeling so purposeful. I don't think I ever even used that word before Sandy.

A neighbor told me recently, "You lifted our heads from our hands."

"You pulled my head out of the sand," I wish I had replied.



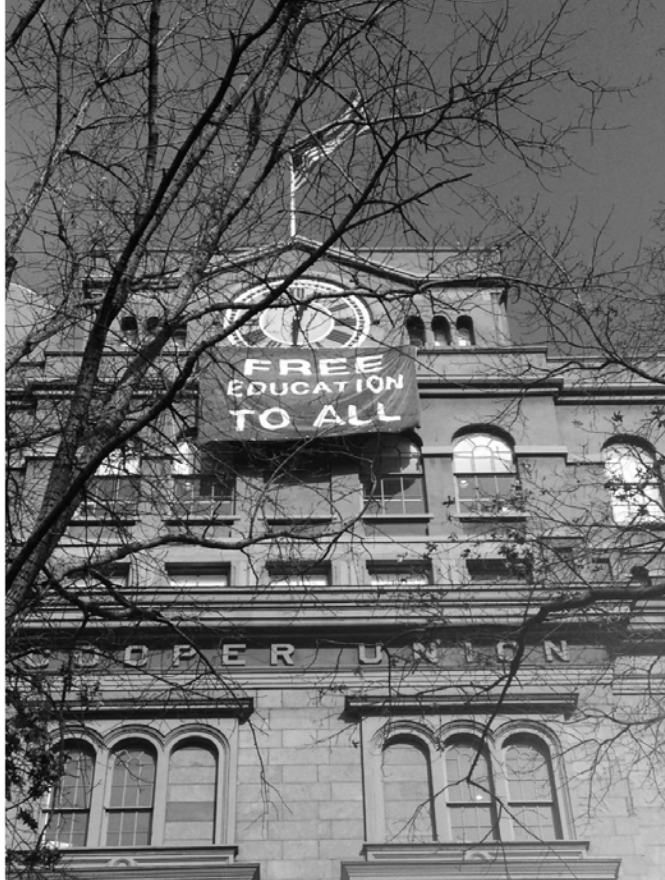


Photo: Students for a Free Cooper Union. • [cusos.org](http://cusos.org)

# Hidden in Plain Sight: The Education Movement

BY ZOLTÁN GLÜCK, MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL, ISABELLE NASTASIA, AND CONOR TOMÁS REED,  
Students and faculty of the City University of New York

## I. Flashpoints

In Florida, the Dream Defenders march for three days and hold a sit-in at a Sheriff's office to demand George Zimmerman's arrest for murdering Black seventeen year-old Trayvon Martin. Undocumented youth in the Southwest enter and organize inside detention centers that violate Obama's proposed immigration reforms. Philadelphia high school students perform a zombie flash mob to protest the closure of 37 schools; their video goes viral. NYC students and faculty host a Free University with hundreds of teachers in a midtown Manhattan park and Cooper Union students stage an arts-driven occupation to keep their institution tuition-free. Students in California patiently construct a statewide student union that includes a wide mosaic of participants. Fossil fuels divestment campaigns at Swarthmore, Harvard, Syracuse, and elsewhere model their efforts on the anti-Apartheid movement. — Internationally: students temporarily occupy bridges and buildings in Budapest, pour into streets of Delhi in outrage after the rape and death of a young woman medical student, take control of public universities in Chile and Puerto Rico to oppose neoliberal strangleholds on school and society, and exercise mass disruptive power in Quebec to overturn proposed tuition hikes and oust government officials. In all of these places participants learn from and connect with struggles being waged abroad.

This is the education movement—hidden in plain sight and erupting around the world. We are forming organizations, holding rallies, sharing strategies and tactics, and building power. Our movement manifests in both local and international struggles, with an increasing frequency of protests and resistance to tuition hikes, precaritization, and the debt burden incurred by higher education. The sharp cries of those disenfranchised inside and outside the university articulate the crisis of a crumbling educational system that is a symptom of a broader crisis of capitalism. This crisis affects us all and so we have begun to form alliances across social groups—students, contingent and tenured faculty, campus staff, families, and communities at large.

## II. Building a Movement

Within the university new threats loom as old hierarchies are being unsettled. The specter of massive open online courses puts tenured faculty in danger of being outsourced and expendable, which may propel them into finally taking direct action. Meanwhile, abysmally paid adjuncts now represent 70% of university educators and are developing a combative awareness of how crucial their labor is. What if adjunct strikes were on the horizon, and what if major academic networks as

well as students supported them? What if in turn they supported ongoing student actions across the country?

How can we create a vibrant movement for educational justice? The linchpin of our academic institutions are the families, workers, and students that make up these places. And so we must build highly engaged coalitions that can work across universities and the diverse set of social groups outside the university. We need new collaborative methods of diverse leadership that straddle social groups and build broad and dynamic bases. This is how we will craft winnable campaigns around issues that are deeply felt in our schools and our communities. Some practical steps towards building this power include:

1. Mapping our sources of collective power across departments, clubs, campus unions, neighborhoods, and other professional and personal networks.
2. Identifying and pressuring specific targets (individual people, not institutions, are easier to oust in the short-term).
3. Charting strategic timelines with goals that address short, intermediate, and long-term policy and structural changes.

4. Sharing our experiences and resources as organizers.
5. Establishing common values as we build towards more democratic control of our schools and communities.

We are in movement and are being moved, influenced and radicalized by world events. We see shrinking life prospects, the immiseration of our peers and neighbors, and the gutting of our schools by private interests who are making billions in profits on our growing indebtedness. But we also see powerful examples of education power and resistance in places as varied as Chile, Puerto Rico, and Quebec, as well as in our own departments, universities and towns. Across the world we are winning small victories everyday. Every time concrete policy changes impact working conditions, halt tuition increases, or increase funding for public education, it is an important step that builds power. Such wins have the potential to move entire societies in new directions. And so we are demanding, quietly at first but growing in volume and intensity, a new order of things. This is more than just about universities—we demand to be active agents and decision-makers in our collective future. ■

## The Workers Rose on May Day or Postscript to Karl Marx

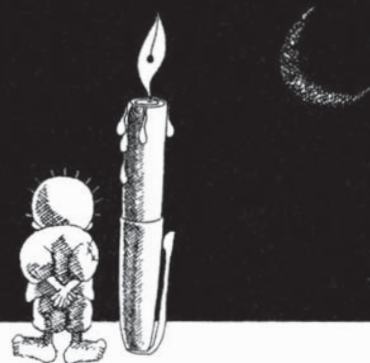
BY AUDRE LORDE

Down Wall Street  
the students marched for peace.  
Above, construction workers looking on  
remembered the old days  
how it was for them  
before their closed shop white security  
and daddy pays the bills  
so taught their the hardhats climbed down girders  
and sons a lesson  
called Marx as a victim of a generation gap  
called I grew up the hard way so will you  
called  
the limits of a sentimental vision.

When this passion play was over  
and the dust had cleared on Wall Street  
500 Union workers together with the police  
had mopped up Foley Square  
with 2000 of their striking sons  
who broke and ran  
before their fathers' chains.

Look here Karl Marx  
the apocalyptic vision of amerika!  
Workers rise and win  
and have not lost their chains  
but swing them  
side by side with the billyclubs in blue  
securing Wall Street  
against the striking students.

(1973)





# Learning from Detroit

## LAND, LIFE, LIBERATION

### **“What time is it on the clock of the world?”**

—James and Grace Lee Boggs,  
*Revolution and Evolution in the  
Twentieth Century* (1974)

**I**n speaking of Detroit, we are cautious. The name itself is burdened with journalistic clichés and romantic fantasies about the picturesque wasteland, the decayed rust-belt, and the tragedy of the American Dream. These images tend to erase those living and struggling in the city. To speak of Detroit is necessarily to enter a contested landscape in both geographical and ideological terms. We feel compelled to engage nonetheless.

In both its devastation and possibility, we encounter Detroit as an outpost from our collective future. Our friends describe their home as “The Chiapas of the North.” And like the Zapatistas, their long-term struggles throw everything, everywhere, into a new light: our own cities, our own work, our own lives. In Detroit, local struggles for racial, economic, and environmental justice are understood in a global context of empire, neoliberalism, and climate disaster. This is all communicated in a fundamental question we heard time and again in Detroit: *How do we live?* This is the basis of what our friends call “visionary organizing.”

### **Why Detroit?**

Long before the latest convulsion of Wall Street brought forth the cry “We are the 99%,” communities of color in East Detroit were already living the permanent disaster of capitalism. It has been a crisis-center of the global economy for decades. Detroit echoes in mythic proportions the devastation dealt by capital to poor people from Buffalo

to the Bronx to Baltimore and beyond. The entire landscape of East Detroit is a Wall Street crime scene. Each empty lot or abandoned home retains the traces of displaced families and communities.

As capital and the state have receded from entire swaths of what used to be the city, the survivors have remade the scorched earth into a radical laboratory for experiments in non-capitalist living: urban farms, non-monetary economies, cooperatives, educational and arts initiatives. These projects are not simple acts of protest. They are self-organized survival struggles grounded in principles of care, healing, and community.

### **Rupture and Other Rhythms of Struggle**

We captured the imagination of the world when we occupied Wall Street for two months. At the symbolic epicenter of the corporate assault on all life, we supported and cared for one another through mutual aid and direct action. For a brief period, we became experts of our own lives. Then governmental agencies employed brutality, surveillance, and other tactics to suppress our freedoms. As we were forcefully evicted from our occupied parks and squares, we understood that democracy was as elusive in New York as it was Cairo or Tunis.

Following the eviction, we began to sharpen our analysis of debt and to understand its central role in the structural adjustments that subjugate nations, cities, and individuals alike. Then, Hurricane Sandy struck our city, and we stepped into the void left by the state. Once again, we were reminded that our struggle against the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few is also a struggle for life—and that an obsession with growth and firing up a sputtering economy misses the larger ecological questions confronting the planet at large.

Sandy challenged us with a different scale and



temporality. The rupture sent us to Detroit with questions. There we met generations of militant and visionary organizers who have worked below the radar to reimagine and reconstruct their neighborhoods along non-capitalist lines, brick by brick, block by block. We have much to learn from Detroit, starting with our relationship to time. *What would it mean to combine a politics of rupture with other rhythms of struggle?* Revolutionary patience will be essential.

### The Centrality of Land

East Detroit has ceased to be a city in any recognizable sense. It is beyond the divide between urban and rural. In the void of capital, it has become possible for residents to liberate and cultivate the land for communal reproduction. When the people care for the land, the land cares for the people. This is not about agrarian simplicity. We share with our friends in Detroit an understanding that land is central to building movements, practicing freedom, and sustaining life. As we found in our own small way at Wall Street, liberated territories are necessary for nurturing, educating, and feeding the freedom fighters of the future.

Liberating land is not simply an act of physical reclamation. In Detroit, it has required a dense combination of tools, skills, knowledge, wisdom, commitment, and relationships developed over generations. The commons have not just been there for the taking. They have been produced through struggle.

And struggles are playing out as we speak. Vast landscapes of empty lots, foreclosed homes, and moldering factories in Detroit are now in the crosshairs of state agencies and developers. This new enclosure movement is unfolding against the backdrop of collective debt bondage. The entire city is on the cusp of being mortgaged to an “emergency management plan” by the state of Michigan on account of the debts its owes to Wall Street.

Municipal bonds are being weaponized to raze the last remnants of public infrastructure. Let it burn, clear the slate, expropriate. That’s how the 1% rolls.

Detroit, which is 85% black, is about to be taken over by 80% white Michigan on the pretext of outstanding debts. But that begs the question: Who owes what to whom? To hide the racial and class biases motivating the abandonment of entire communities, expropriation can even take on a green veneer: vast expanses of the former city will return to nature, it is said, becoming an ecological amenity for new waves of “creative” pioneers in search of a frontier experience of their own. Urban farming risks becoming a buzzword of entrepreneurial greenwashing — think Hantz Farms — the precise opposite of community-based agriculture and environmental justice.

### Moving Together

We stand with the liberators of the land. But to do so in a meaningful way will require an intensive learning process that we have only just embarked upon. What, if anything, we may have to offer remains to be seen. Conversations are happening, knowledge is being shared, bonds are being forged.

As we organize, we are mindful of what we heard in Detroit: Who is the we in the room? Who are we accountable to? Who is not in the room? Who should be in the room? And are we organizing at the grassroots level, involving those who should be involved?

We have been striking the death machine at Wall Street. Seeds of non-capitalist healing and freedom are being sewn in Detroit. There is a synergy of analysis and a solidarity of spirit. Our geographies are already conjoined. Back and forth, hosting and visiting, we could be on the threshold of an historic alliance based in a common affirmation of land, life, and liberation.



### “Grow a Garden, Grow a Community”

Greenhouse at  
Freedom Freedom,  
East Detroit.

•  
[freedomfreedom.  
wordpress.com](http://freedomfreedom.wordpress.com)



**BLOCK BY BLOCK ■ FEB 2013**

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**WHAT'S  
NEXT?**